

Sex, Lies, and Unprofessional Relationships

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Unprofessional relationships in the military have been discussed frequently in the news during the recent past. Lt Kelly Flinn's case was perhaps the top news story in America the week prior to her discharge. Air Force Lt Bill Kite was in the news because he faced charges of fraternization and making false statements regarding his relationship with an enlisted woman, even though she had since left the military and married him. He requested and was granted an administrative discharge by the secretary of the Air Force.

On 29 July 1998, the secretary of defense announced new rules for "good order and discipline" as they relate to unprofessional relationships. Under the new guidelines, all of the armed services will be expected to follow consistent standards. Previously, the Army considered a relationship to be fraternization, a criminal unprofessional relationship between an officer and enlisted person, only if it involved individuals within the same chain of command. However, Secretary William S. Cohen has directed all the services to implement rules in which any fraternizing of enlisted and officers is unacceptable. Even with all the publicity, I am amazed how unaware some military members are of the rules concerning unprofessional relationships such as fraternization. In a company-grade officer-of-the-quarter board I chaired, few of the officers were conversant with Air Force Instruction (AFI) 36-2909, *Professional and Unprofessional Relationships*, or even knew this instruction dealt with fraternization, yet fraternization can lead to a court-martial or discharge. We need to educate every member of the Air Force on this issue.

Unprofessional relationships can occur between any Air Force members and between Air Force members and civilian employees. They include on- or off-duty relationships that detract from the authority of superiors or result in, or reasonably create the appearance of favoritism, misuse of office or position, or the abandonment of organizational goals for personal interests. Unprofessional relationships can have an adverse effect on morale, discipline, and respect for authority. Members of the military are held to a high standard in their relationships with other military members. Military members must also maintain professional relationships with civilian employees.

All officers and enlisted members should make sure they are familiar with AFI 36-2909, published 1 May 1996. In fact, the instruction requires commanders to make cer-

tain all personnel are briefed at least annually on the concepts in this instruction. The instruction is only four pages long and can be located on the Internet at your command's publications site.

The instruction also discusses *fraternization*, which is a personal, unprofessional relationship between an officer and enlisted member. Fraternization violates the customary bounds of acceptable behavior in the Air Force and prejudices good order and discipline. If a major dates a lieutenant, it is not considered fraternization; but, for example, it could be an unprofessional relationship if the major wrote the lieutenant's performance report. The main concern that the crime of fraternization is trying to protect against is a personal relationship that would prejudice or harm morale, the good order and discipline of the service, or unit cohesion. The instruction includes specific prohibitions, violations of which can be punished under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ): (1) officers will not gamble with enlisted members; (2) officers will not borrow money from or otherwise become indebted to enlisted members; (3) officers will not date or engage in sexual relations with enlisted members; and (4) officers will not share living accommodations with enlisted members.

Besides fraternization, some of the more publicized cases have involved charges of adultery, lying, and disobeying an order. Military members who are truthful and cooperate with their commanders, in my opinion, demonstrate a greater willingness to correct unprofessional behavior. Lying and making false statements can lead to more serious charges under Articles 107 and 134, UCMJ. I am amazed that military members who were lawfully ordered to cease an unprofessional relationship disobeyed and then complained when punitive actions were taken.

In a 16 July 1997 memorandum to all commanders, the secretary and chief of staff of the Air Force jointly provided clarification and guidance about Air Force policy on fraternization and unprofessional relationships. They noted that the authority of officers is jeopardized when they are motivated by personal relationships rather than what is best for subordinates and the organization. Unprofessional relationships can reflect favoritism and degrade respect for authority. Our top leaders point out that the best ways for commanders and supervisors to prevent fraternization and unprofessional relationships are through training and setting an example of professional

relations with subordinates and supervisors. Commanders also have a wide range of responses to violations—“not every case warrants severe sanction” or court-martial. Commanders should use good judgment in dealing with each case in a way that is proportionate to the offense. Air

Force members should study the guidelines and apply them in the context of our core values. A little self-control and good judgment are worth it when you consider the possible consequences of unprofessional conduct.